

Written Testimony of Representative Brenda Lawrence (MI-14)
Make It in America: What's Next?
PANEL 4: The Future of American Manufacturing & Skills Training

Congressman Hoyer and my colleagues, thank you for inviting me to testify about the importance of investing in America's skilled workforce and the role they play in strengthening America's manufacturing industry and economy.

A strong manufacturing sector is essential to our nation's economic prosperity. According to data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, manufacturers contributed \$2 trillion to the U.S. economy in 2014.

The manufacturing industry also supports an estimated 17.6 million jobs in the United States—about one in six private-sector jobs.

In Michigan alone, more than 600,000 Americans are employed by the manufacturing industry. Just last month, Michigan ranked second among all States by adding 2,600 new manufacturing jobs.

So, Mr. Hoyer – the answer is yes! Manufacturing is making a strong comeback and is poised for even bigger gains in the years ahead. But, major challenges exist.

According to The Manufacturing Institute, more than 80 percent of U.S. executives believe the widening skills gap in our workforce will negatively impact their ability to meet customer demand.

As some of you know, I am the co-Chair of the bi-partisan Congressional Investment in America's Skilled Workforce Caucus.

I started this Caucus to highlight the growing concerns and challenges voiced by industry, labor, and academic experts on the difficulty in finding skilled workers to fill jobs, as well as the skills gap currently prevalent in our workforce.

I am proud to say that we currently have 31 Members of Congress including 9 Republicans, who are working together to examine the current workforce framework, and find ways to improve and thereby strengthen our nation's workforce.

This Saturday, October 31st, a co-chair of my caucus, my good friend, Rep. French Hill from the 2nd Congressional District of Arkansas will be visiting my district to take part in an event that highlights the importance of skilled-jobs in our nation's economy. We will visit job-sites in my district and assume the duties of technicians and other professionals.

Last month, I was fortunate to accompany President Obama on Air Force One to Warren, Michigan, where he announced \$175 Million in American Apprenticeship grants. Michigan is 1 of 14 States to expand apprenticeship programs by more than 20 percent.

However, more needs to be done. We rank 28th out of 29 among developed countries, spending only 0.1 percent of our GDP in federal expenditures on workforce training programs. According to a Brookings Institution report, apprentices make up only 0.2 percent of the U.S. labor force.

We need to overcome the negative perceptions of vocational training programs, and apprenticeship programs. We also need to recognize that a four-year college program is becoming unaffordable for most middle-class American families. Lastly, we need to recognize that students who fare poorly in our educational system might succeed in a system that emphasizes a learning-by-doing culture.

According to a report by Georgetown University, there will be 55 million job openings through 2020. More than 60 percent of those jobs will require a post-secondary education. Unfortunately, the United States is expected to fall short by 5 million workers with postsecondary education – at the current production rate – by 2020.

The bottom line: The U.S. can and must close the skills gap to remain competitive, and to re-build the most productive workforce in the world – the American middle-class.

Thank you!